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The St. Marks Migratory Bird Refuge

PAUL T. KREAGER, '28

U. S. Biological Survey

Just as early man killed off the Indian, so is his successors killing off the game unless something is done and done immediately to curb the killing desire of many of our American people. Just as our forests are being depleted, so is the game being depleted. We have in part learned our lesson in forestry; so why not take heed before "the horse is stolen the second time?"

The "barn door" is being closed now slowly but surely by the establishment of migratory bird refuges throughout the United States, both in the breeding country and in the resting country or wintering grounds.

Early in 1929 an area for a refuge near St. Marks, Florida, was proposed and immediate action was taken to set it apart for a wintering ground for both Canada gees and ducks, as well as for other migratory birds. However, several steps had to be taken before the government could get title to the land.

The first step consisted of an examination of the grounds from the standpoint of available food supply. An abundant supply was found on the area, consisting of nut grass in the marsh and salt water grasses in the bordering shallow waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

The second step came about when an examination party went in and made a type map of the area and assembled tax data, ownership maps and valuation tables of the land.

The type map is made by running half-mile strips with compass and pacing, mapping to a scale of two inches to the mile. Plane tables are used for this work when the areas are suitable, but generally cross-section paper and protractors serve the purpose very well.

A chained base line is used for control of the final strips which go to make up the basis of the final type map.

Variation in type was made where it was felt that there was a different value attached to the land in question, such as marsh, nut grass, water, timber, etc. In the end each type is given a very definite value, based upon past sales, neighboring sales and location as well as any other factor which might fit the case. An ocular estimate per "forty" of all timber was also made.

The third step consisted of carrying out negotiations and placing the land under lease or option. This work is generally carried out from the Washington office.

The last step was the establishment officially of the outside

boundaries of the refuge by surveyors, setting all monuments and posting the lines.

Patrolling and improvement take up step four and these have been started this fall and winter. Patrolling on this area must be done mainly from boat and horseback as no other means of transportation is as efficient as yet. Patrol by water means the covering of about 24 miles of water front, while the interior covers an area of about 14 miles in one direction and a greatest width of about six miles in the other.

This area at the present time covers approximately 20,000 acres, three-fourths of it marshland, while the remainder is in pine and swamp land. The principal species of pine is slash, with a little longleaf. The marsh land has intermingled throughout it sand flats varying greatly in size from a few acres to some fifty acres. Geese use these flats intensively during the winter as resting places, feeding in the nut grass which borders the flats.

In years to come will we be able to look over green-topped mountains and see great "V" shaped flocks of honking geese and thousands of ducks winging their way to and from their breeding places? Or will we look with saddened eyes, dimmed by age, over mountains of burned stubs and storm-torn gullies, seeing only a few battered remnants of wild fowl slowly hovering in the open, empty air? Which will it be? Future generations will feel the effect of our present decision.

The waterfowl situation is a matter not only for the biologist to think about, but for every born forester to think about. Game conservation must go hand in hand with future forestry practice and even though the "barn door" is locked, that doesn't keep us from making good use of the "horse" while we have him.



*Gee! I'm sorry for the fellow
Who cannot be made to see
All the pleasure, thrills and rapture
That the woodlands hold for me;
I am sorry for the fellow
Who cannot gaze upon a stream,
And see naught but unchained power,
Naught but elements of steam.
For his soul is dead to beauty,
And his eyes I must impugn
With the gorgeousness of nature
Is quite sadly out of tune.*